

## Note from the Field

### Army Discharge Review Board Streamlines and Reduces Processing Times

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On 10 February 1996, the National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 1996<sup>1</sup> was signed into law. Under Section 554 of the Act, the Secretary of Defense is required to "review the system and procedures used by the Secretary in the exercise of authority under section 1552, Title 10, United States Code, in order to identify potential improvements that could be made in the process for correcting military records."<sup>2</sup> Prior to this statutory directive, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs identified the need for a revamping of the Army's major review agency and directed a complete restructuring of the agency, in an attempt to improve service to soldiers. The agency was renamed the Army Review Boards Agency (ARBA) and gained new leadership.

The ARBA has made great strides in its reorganization. Two of its major goals were to reduce the backlog of cases before its boards and to reduce the processing time of its cases. The Army Discharge Review Board (ADRB), which reviews

requests by former service members for discharge upgrades, met the challenge. In June 1996, the ADRB had a backlog of approximately 4600 cases, and the processing time for discharge upgrade requests averaged four years. The ADRB successfully eliminated this backlog within a year. The ADRB projects the processing of a new case will now take approximately 120 days under normal circumstances.

The ADRB has worked hard to meet the challenge of restructuring in a manner that was efficient and fair to applicants. Prior to 1997, the upgrade rate was less than five percent. During 1997, the upgrade rate has been approximately ten percent. However, defense counsel should continue to stress to clients that, while the responsiveness to new applications for discharge upgrades has been greatly improved, a discharge upgrade is not automatic.

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1. Pub. L. No. 104-106, 110 Stat. 186 (1996).

2. *Id.* § 554.